Seattle Human Services Department
Communities Supporting Safe and Stable Housing
Advisory Group Meeting – September 15, 2011

I.   **Welcome, Introductions and recap of Advisory Group work**

Andréa Akita welcomed and thanked advisory group members, for their time, effort and participation in the process. Advisory Group work included the identification of priorities, themes and strategies.

II.   **Moving Forward - Establishing A Framework for Determining Success**

III. **HEARTH Act Measures   (Indicate that this presentation was foundational to the group discussion below)**

Sola Plumacher and Andréa Akita presented information on the HEARTH Act and three of the six performance indicators that the federal government will use for data collection and program evaluation. The discussion of the HEARTH Act Measures provided a foundation for discussion on how providers view success for the system and for HSD investments. A Committee to End Homelessness Task Force is working on methodology for HEARTH. Our local Continuum of Care will establish targets for measuring success using these indicators. Maintaining client centered service goals while meeting HUD HEARTH system level performance requirements will require collective innovation and commitment. The three HEARTH measures covered were: (1) Length of time individuals and families remain homeless. (2) The extent to which individuals and families who leave homelessness experience additional spells of homelessness; and (3) Success at reducing the number of individuals and families who become homeless.

For more information on this, please refer to September 26, 2011 presentation: *"Communities Supporting Safe and Stable Housing: How do we know we are making a difference? Using HEARTH to our Advantage"*

IV. **Group Discussion**

Establishing a Framework for Determining Success within the Expectations of the HEARTH Act and the priorities, themes and strategies identified by the Advisory Group

HEARTH Act
The federal HEARTH Act is the driver of the framework for our system; however this is our opportunity to define targets and measures for success for ourselves within this framework. We should consider limiting the number of measures we set for ourselves, while also making sure County-funded and City-funded priorities and measurements for success are coordinated and aligned in order to not over-burden service providers with too many reporting requirements, both within this RFI and in the context of HEARTH. A major priority of the group was to make sure we focus on measures driven by our local community values.

We need goals that are clear, realistic and within reach, while keeping in mind that there are many factors which indicate whether someone is a "success" beyond securing permanent

housing, such as securing employment and helping their children achieve good grades in school. A caution was raised when using averages as a measurement of success within the system, because one long term stayer will have more of an impact on the average than several short term stayers; however being in a state of homelessness is damaging, and it fits our community values to prioritize preventing long term homelessness. Additionally, we as a continuum need to make sure that "success" is not measured simply by a reduction in the demand for homeless services, for those individuals may still be living in poverty and might simply be ineligible for homeless services. Our local community values should prohibit us from seeing these types of situations as a "success", regardless of the HEARTH measures.

We need to pull the numbers for individual and family emergency shelters, and see what the average length of stay looks like right now, in order to establish an accurate baseline. Average length of stay is often longer than intended length of stay for the program. The performance baseline being used locally for HEARTH will begin as of January 2010.

Service Systems:
- An assessment system needs to be in place, along with increased early intervention services for children in order to prevent cycles of homelessness. It is difficult to have to prioritize serving one group over another, and having to choose between helping a single adult and helping a family is not really a choice at all; however there was also a sense of obligation expressed to intervene in a situation if we can see that without help that individual or family will remain in that situation.
- Helping those clients who find themselves "stuck" in the system will be beneficial for the individuals, our system and HUD funders. Case management support needs to follow people regardless of where they are housed – it is difficult for this to happen in a specific emergency shelter setting, where people may be constantly moving around.
- A suggestion was made to create service subsidies for units to provide case management, even where there is not a rent subsidy provided.
- The homelessness service system cannot be responsible for filling gaps and solving issues created by other systems; this puts too much pressure on homeless service providers. Conversations need to be held with multiple agencies and systems outside of the homeless service system, in order to address homelessness as a priority issue and coordinate both inter- and intra-system responses. We need to look at increasing data-sharing capabilities across systems such as food stamps, DSHS, and TANF to assist this planning effort.
- Thousands of units of privately-owned HUD housing are available and each maintains a separate waiting list, and there was frustration expressed concerning the difficulty of locating the list of local HUD housing. These housing units are required to house the next person on the waiting list, regardless of whether or not they are currently living in-state. We are currently not prioritizing the most at-risk, needy families in our community. We have to take an inventory of homeless families in our system, to make sure they all get onto the Section 8 waiting lists. It was suggested this could be a part of the Coordinated Entry

system for families.

- A concern was expressed that investments in basic survival services and emergency shelter beds should not be defunded in order to fund increased prevention efforts and wrap-around services. The group was reminded that many people have died on the streets, and providing adequate shelter beds has to be seen as a basic survival issue in order to keep people alive.
- There are many economic factors contributing to longer lengths of stay in our system, such as difficulty securing and maintaining employment and historically low vacancy rates. It will take time to get out of this economic situation, and we have to continue to work towards ending homelessness while simultaneously making sure we are not allowing the situation to get any worse. We also cannot count on a recovering economy to end homelessness, because we were seeing an increase in homelessness even back when the economy was booming. There has to be a reprioritization of public resources to those with the greatest needs, and we as a community have to make it a common value to focus on helping people exit homelessness as quickly as possible.
- Everyone has to work to maintain and increase political advocacy efforts, which includes advocating and communicating the needs of homeless individuals and families to elected officials.
- There may not be an "aha" solution with less money, but we have to come up with a menu of things that this group can prioritize. Throughout this process, there have not been a lot of great ideas of how to spend less money, but rather a lot of frustration expressed with the current situation.
- This is the fifth meeting in the series – How can the City be sure to invest in supporting measurable goals which align with our community values, such as maintaining client-centered, accessible, all-inclusive services? How do we make sure to keep people and agencies at the table and engaged? We all have to look at what small changes can be made within the system in the context of this RFI, in order for us to be successful and get us that much closer to our goals, while still keeping the bigger picture and long term system goals in mind.

V. **Meeting Adjourned**
Andréa Akita thanked the Advisory Group members once again for their participation in this process. A draft Investment Plan will be released for public comment in October, and she encourage everyone to provide comment on it.